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ABSTRACT

Approaches to the difficulties facing higher education are considered, based on the viewpoint of the governor of Oklahoma. It is suggested that if scarce financial resources are used to maintain a broad-based liberal education, difficult choices will need to be made in other areas in order to preserve that priority. For example, it is too expensive for every higher education institution to offer every graduate program. In addition, it is necessary to move from using only quantitative measures for deciding what programs to continue to refund, and it is obviously inadvisable to produce two or three times as many teachers as can be absorbed into the system. It is suggested that faculty members of the colleges of education be utilized for inservice training in the elementary and other education systems. There is a need to adjust to a whole new student market, including part-time students. Greater communication between the higher education community and public officials is also required. (SW)

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A GOVERNOR'S AGENDA FOR ACTION IN HIGHER EDUCATION

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DAVID L. BOREN

Governor of Oklahoma

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A GOVERNOR'S AGENDA FOR ACTION IN HIGHER EDUCATION

David Boren

I am very glad to be able to be with you today. From that very flattering introduction that the Chancellor gave me, you might be able to guess that I am in the process of working on Oklahoma's budget for the coming year.

I feel humble to be asked to address this group. You are far more expert than I in the field of higher education and the priorities that we need to set. I am glad there are not too many Oklahomans in the audience because some of them might be brave enough to say, "Governor, why are you going to another state to a meeting of delegates from different states to talk about solving your problems? You ought to stay home and solve them here." That is one of the privileges of visiting governors. We can comment to groups from other states with great wisdom about what needs to be done even though we often have difficulty doing it ourselves.

I am glad to be able to be with you, and I feel at home in this group. I am on an indefinite leave of absence from my teaching duties. The board of trustees took a look at my record my first year in office and decided that I was going to need to maintain tenure. There are a lot of people in the state who have enthusiasm for my teaching ability. The longer I serve as governor, the more letters I get suggesting I return to the classroom.

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I am sorry I was not able to be here for all the sessions because I would have been interested to have heard the discussion about what we can do, how we can improve relationships and understanding between the legislature and the community of higher education. I think we are coming into a very, very challenging time as far as the funding of education is concerned. We are at a critical period in terms of defining where we should go with higher education. Enrollments are now leveling off. We have not had the tremendous growth we have had in the past. The real economic growth of this country has slowed down, particularly the growth of state revenues so that we now have tremendous competition for them. Frankly I do not think that is going to get any better. I think that it is going to get even tighter. As I look at what is happening to the country, as we look at a thirty billion dollar balance of payments deficit this year, as we look at escalating costs for the year, depression in the agricultural sector, many, many other factors, I think we have to think in the next few years in terms of an even tougher economic situation as far as competition for funding is concerned.

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Yet at this point it is not as gloomy as it might seem. I noticed the *Chronicle* indicated that over the past two years we have still made an improvement. We have gone up 6 percent in the real terms over and above inflation nationally in terms of public support for higher education. So while it has been increasingly difficult, it has not been as gloomy as some people have been saying.

I know you have been talking about what you can do to make your case to the legislature, what you can do to maintain adequate funding for higher education. One of the things, I think, we need to stop and ask ourselves right off the bat is what it is we ought to be selling. We should do this before we get into the question of how we are going to interrelate and how we are going to sell higher education to the public and to those who represent the public elective office. The most important part of the whole process is to decide what it is that higher education should be doing. That is the most important point of all.

We have gotten into the habit, I think, of looking at the symptoms or looking at the mechanism too often instead of stopping to take account of what it is that we ought to be doing fundamentally in the first place. I heard a speech the other day at the Southern Growth Policies Board. We were discussing federal funding formulas for problems like urban decay and all the rest. And I heard a speaker get up and say, "The formula, that's where it is. That's where the action is, that's where the meat of the coconut is. You have to understand the formula for federal funding." And I could not help but think to myself, more important than understanding the formula, we had better understand what it is we are trying to treat.

Take two cities of the same size like Lowell, Massachusetts, and Abilene, Texas. At Lowell there is massive unemployment with 37 percent of the population receiving some form of income supplement from the government. Whereas, Abilene is a developing area with only four percent receiving some kind of income supplement. Rather than just looking at the formula for getting the money into Lowell, we had better try to look at the root causes of what took place there, and treat the disease and not just the symptoms. We had better do that in higher education as well. We better begin to think in terms of what it is that we truly need to be doing.

George Bernard Shaw once said in *The Doctor's Dilemma* "All professions are a conspiracy against the laity." That may be true in many respects. One of the things that we must not be in higher education is a conspiracy against the laity. We have to play a much broader role in society than that. If I had to point to one thing that concerns me in this country more than anything else today, if I had to pick out the most serious problem that we face, I would define it as the breakdown of the sense of community that has held us together for so long. Our people have developed tunnel vision. We have become so specialized that we can barely communicate with each other. We have become Balkanized geographically

in this country. I know I get very frustrated because I happen to come from an energy-producing state, for example. I go to Washington to testify, and I say "How does it make any sense when we have a thirty billion dollar balance of payments deficit for us to be arguing about paying our domestic producers $1.75 for a unit of natural gas when we are buying gas from Algeria for four dollars a unit right now? How does that help the American consumer? What is it going to do to the national security when we're dependent upon foreign sources for fifty percent of all the oil we use? In the event of an embargo, emergency rationing plans will provide eight gallons of gasoline per week per head of household." If I talk about something like that, you know what happens? The chairman of the committee invariably will lean back, and he will say, "Governor, we're very happy to have you. You've presented the Oklahoma point of view very well." They might just as well have said, "Thank you Sheik Boren from American OPEC."

This is a very real problem. We have trouble in this country today relating to the problems of each other, and this is true in reverse, too. People in Oklahoma have trouble understanding the people in New England who are dependent on home-heating oil. This is one of the things that disturbs me that I see in the Governor's office, and I am sure members of the legislature see it from their perspective. Sometimes at the end of the day when you have seen all those different people from all those different groups, you think, "I wonder who it is that's speaking for the public good? I wonder who in this country can say, I wish this to be done for the benefit of the total community."

It is true at all levels of government. Very often it has become a matter of self-defense. At the municipal level, I was talking to a group of policemen not long ago, and they were saying, "You know we have to organize to make wage demands and even threaten work stoppages because we have got to make sure we get our share because the firemen organized, and the firemen organized because the streetworkers organized, and they organized because the waterworkers organized, and on and on and on." So we have this instead of an old-fashioned New England community meeting, if we can think of it in that way, in which everybody sat down and listened to the needs and perspectives of each other. In which, although I were in a different profession than you or lived in a different part of town or had different economic needs, I would listen to you. I understood your needs. As if we had all sat down together and had a consensus and then tried to make a policy that would be fair to everybody. We are in grave danger in this country of losing that sense of community perspective that has held us together. We have believed in this country for years that if two competing political philosophies are at cross purposes, the majority rules. I think, if we polled this group and I asked if the majority should rule, you would agree. On the other hand, if I asked you if the majority had the prerogative to compel the minority to give up their right of free speech, I do not think you would agree,

because we believe there are certain inalienable individual rights that the majority cannot take away. Now, who is to be the judge of those rights of the individuals or of the minorities? It is ultimately the majority, buffered somewhat by the Supreme Court and other institutions which are ultimately answerable in the long run to majority feelings.

So how have two competing inconsistent philosophies, that we both agree that we support so strongly, coexisted in this country? They have coexisted because we have had a fair majority sensitive to the rights and needs of individuals and of minorities. That is how they have coexisted. What has resulted is called the general will. The general will is enlightened. It is that community spirit that prevails at the meeting when people are not all voting their own individual narrow self-interests. They are voting for what they think is fair to everybody. To me this is the greatest need that we have in this country.

What does that say to us in higher education? It says to me that the greatest need that higher education can address today is to produce well-rounded people, citizens who will be the ones at the meeting who will speak for the community. They will be the ones that will tie it together; they will give a sense of perspective that can only come from a broad-based liberal education.

All the pressures today, because of rising education costs, pressures from student attitudes themselves, tend to be in the other direction. Students today tend to say, "I don't want to have to take so many courses in so many fields. I want something with which I can walk out of here tomorrow and make a living." We in higher education have been on the run for years. We have been weakening a little bit more every year. We have been giving in a little bit more. We tried to create new courses and new programs that are aimed at giving the students an immediate source of income the minute they walk out of the door.

We have been retreating from our basic obligation. We have even let people say, "we can't afford to over-educate people in this day and time. We can't afford to educate them in the humanities, or in philosophy, or in literature, or in broad studies." This country has never suffered from over-education. That is certainly not the greatest danger facing this country today. You know, it would be a tremendous irony if we, one of the most highly specialized and developed people in human history, were destroyed from within because of a basic ignorance of the core of civilized knowledge of our own history, and where we came from, and the forces which have shaped us. It would be tragic if we passed on inadequate knowledge of our own humanity; so I contend that what we have to do first of all is preserve that broad, basic core of knowledge. That is the first job of higher education.

Somehow we must translate that need to our public policy makers. Now having said that, I think we are still under strong obligation to do that as

cost-effectively as we can. I think it also implies some very tough choices in other areas. If it appears to take the precious and scarce financial resources which we have to maintain a broad-based liberal education, it means we are going to have to make some tough choices in other areas in order to preserve that priority. We cannot build duplicate graduate programs, for example. I know there are differences between states. In this state you have very few colleges and universities in proportion to your population. In Oklahoma, we are blessed with a vast number of publicly supported institutions of higher education: approximately twenty. We are blessed with several of them in the wrong place at the wrong time. People lived there fifty years ago but no longer do. So sometimes that blessing is not so much of a blessing as a curse. We cannot afford for every institution of higher education to offer every graduate program that you can think of. We cannot afford that cost.

I remember one of our indecisions not too long ago. We started a new program in business, a graduate program in business education. We calculated the probable cost. We already had an existing graduate program in business education. I believe the chancellor's office found out that at least in the first year or two the cost per credit hour in the existing program was something like seventeen dollars an hour but in the new programs they were something like two hundred and fifty dollars an hour because we had to duplicate and build from the beginning. We cannot afford to duplicate.

Obviously we are going to have to have specialization at the graduate level, but we are going to have to decide what it is we are going to be offering. We cannot continue to offer more and more new programs at the graduate level without subtracting some of the programs that we are now offering. If you have a limited amount of money and you want to maintain a quality program, how in the world can you keep on adding new programs every day of the month and maintain the quality of the programs that you are now conducting?

I don't mean to say that we should never have changes. When I talk about broad-based knowledge at the undergraduate level, for example, it is assumed at the graduate level students already have that broad core of knowledge. We then need to be very careful about what we specialize in.

Needs may change. Professional and occupational skill needs of communities will change. So we may need new programs, but if when adding new programs, if we have limited funds, we are going to have to do away with some that we are now offering. Yet can we find one state where we are holding steady the number of graduate programs which we are offering? I would doubt it. It is difficult to maintain a moratorium. Regardless, we must be careful about adding new programs. Once a program is established, it is hard to ever disestablish it even if the needs change because you have built in faculties, you have vested interest,

you have people who have job securities at stake. So we are going to have to be careful.

Also we need to be much more cautious in the use of quantity as a measure for deciding what programs to continue to refund. In all the states that I know of we have been much too tied to actual headcount approaches to funding higher education. We have not had enough room for qualitative input to decide which programs are really and truly worthwhile. Somehow we have go to move away from quantitative measures only. We are going to have to get out of the brick and mortar syndrome. How many heads of institutions have you heard and how many annual reports or ten-year reports of institutions of higher education have you read in which they chart progress in the following manner: "ten years ago we had five thousand students with nine buildings and today we have thirty thousand with eighty-seven buildings" – as if brick and mortar, for example, and numbers were the only mark of deciding where we have had progress in higher education. We simply cannot afford to keep on doing that at a time of limited resources.

We have under discussion in our state right now, for example, a proposed five hundred million dollar state bond issue. Our management people have been studying this. We find that if a state spends five hundred million dollars on capital expansion, capital projects, new buildings for new programs (not of course remodeling old buildings to make them more energy-conserving, for that would be a wise expenditure of funds, nor replacing an old building with a new building to be more efficient and less costly to operate), it can just chalk up about fifteen to twenty percent of the cost of the five hundred million as additional annual operating expense. What does that mean? Well, I chalked that up in Oklahoma. If we take fifteen percent of five hundred million, that means our operating budget would go up $75 million to occupy and operate the new buildings. We're already going to have an eighty-seven million dollar increase this next year. If we have to take out a bond issue thoughtlessly without being very careful about its impact on operating cost, we could bankrupt the quality of existing programs. We almost reached that point once in Oklahoma when we opened up a medical school. That came the first year I was in office. They asked for supplemental appropriations because they could not move into a new building that had been built for them because they couldn't pay the utility bills. Obviously we have to be careful about over-committing ourselves. We're going to have to make tough choices. We're going to have to have some moving around of resources. I think members of the legislature are going to expect this and have a right to expect this.

We cannot turn out of our institutes two or three times as many teachers, for example, as we can absorb into our systems. We ought to raise standards. Teacher compensation is improving; so we ought to raise standards and ought not be turning out more than we have in the past. This is difficult to do because

the first question asked is what do you do with all of the College of Education faculty members.

I think one of the things we could do is utilize them for in-service training in our elementary and common education systems. I think that would be a tremendous thing. Some states are beginning to move in this area. Think of the interchange, the breath of fresh air that can come from people who in the past have been teaching in the colleges of education. One could maintain the rights of tenured faculty by using part of their time for in-service training with those who have actually been in the classroom for perhaps twenty years. It would be valuable to both: the faculty member who perhaps has not experienced what it is like in an elementary classroom and the elementary teacher who has been teaching a certain way for twenty years and is scared of new ideas. So there are ways of changing our resources and still minimizing the impact upon our own faculty.

We have got to adjust to a whole new student market. Fifty percent of all the students in higher education in this country today are part-time students. It is not any longer true that you just go to school a certain time in your life. We have more and more people who are coming back later in life and improving their educational experience. Also we have to think about adjusting ourselves. How many speeches have you heard by educators about education being an on-going process through all of life.

We have all got to be prepared for change. "One of the most vivid truths of this age," Margaret Mead wrote, "is that no one will live all his life in the world in which he was born, and no one will die in the world in which he worked in his maturity." How often have you heard that quoted by people in higher education? But they might have added at the end of it, except us. I am a very strong supporter of tenure as I say, I have tenure. But we know that as enrollments level off we cannot allow 80 or 90 percent of the faculty in the various departments to become tenured. I know the importance of tenure and maintaining free expression in the university community. I believe very strongly in it. We may have to look at new forms of tenure. We may have to look at long-term contracts, five or ten year contracts or something else instead of life-time contracts. When a person should no longer be tenured, say at the end of a ten-year contract if it is not going to be renewed, perhaps we should give that person a year or two while he or she adjusts to another occupation or to another role within higher education. We cannot go around preaching education as a life-long process with everyone ready to adjust except us. Higher education would become like the railroads if that happens.

There has to be much more interchange between those in public office and educators. This conference is a healthy thing wherein legislators and policy makers participate with those of you in higher education. There is much too

little of it in this country. Somehow a great gulf has grown up between the policy makers and the educators. Somehow we have been unwilling to translate the knowledge that we have developed into language that can be understood and used by policy makers and by the public. That has to change. One of the greatest things that has happened in Oklahoma, I think, has been the closer relationship between the university community and our legislative committees. We are using members from our academic community to volunteer their time and services to work with legislative committees on particular problems. It makes much better informed public policy, and it should be considered an important cause on the part of the higher-education community.

I think of my experiences in the legislature. When I first came to the legislature, I think that most members of that body would have run and locked the door if they heard a faculty member was going to come to talk to them. They would have felt threatened by it. They felt professors were going to look down on them intellectually.

Now on the other hand, there were many of the members of the higher education community who somehow felt there was something unclean, or uninformed about all politicians, and therefore they should not have anything to do with them. We have got to get over that. What a tragedy. I remember one day sitting in an environmental policy-making committee of the Oklahoma legislature. We were talking about whether or not we should ban phosphates in detergents sold in the state. My law degree did not prepare me to answer that question, but there were several people in our universities with the kind of knowledge that could provide us with tremendous input for making that kind of decision. Do you know how many were there at the meeting? Not one of them. We all sat around and people said, "What does your wife think, does DUZ really get it whiter?" There we were with highly educated people with vast amounts of knowledge on our university campuses thirty miles on either side of us. Their knowledge was not utilized. We are a highly educated society making highly uneducated and ignorant decisions as matters of public policy. It is important not only that we share specialized knowledge but that we develop the mechanism for making this sharing possible.

We are doing that now in Oklahoma by putting together a directory. We have contact people on the two major university campuses and various persons who are in touch with these specialists who have volunteered to help. If a legislative committee has a problem, we know immediately whom to call. Nor should we necessarily think we are always going to be compensated for it because for the sake of maintaining the funding for the whole university system the volunteering of services goes a long way with members of the legislature. It may help bring much greater dividends in the future that may well compensate for the actual time spent. Our administrators need to know that. They may need to reduce individual faculty member's loads to have them help the policy makers.

Let's also bring the policy makers to our campuses from time to time in non-threatening, informal atmospheres. Let's try to convey to them the importance of the broad-based education that I am talking about. Let us bring our policy makers to the campuses for a week, perhaps, sometime for a discussion of a broad base of issues that are confronting us. Let's even give them a little dose of philosophy or sociology or anthropology as we go along in discussing some of the issues, the broader issues that they are facing. Let's not be afraid to try a little intellectual stimulation. We are not afraid to try it on students, and many of those legislators were once students. Many of them would still like to be, and many of them consider themselves to be continuing students of public policy.

I think we face a very great challenge. We cannot continue things as they have always been, but in one sense we must not let the challenges that we face cause us to go off the path and cause us to lose sight of the essential purpose of higher education in the first place. When we make speeches, and say, "go get a college education young man or young women because it will increase your earning power by $200 thousand in a life time or $500 thousand in a life time," I think in the process we not only begin to fool some young people, but we begin to fool ourselves. We begin to stray off the path of what it is we really need to do. When higher education started in this country, the first institutions did not go out and try to bring in students by saying we will increase your earning power. Whom did they train? They trained ministers, they trained teachers, they trained people who could bring a sense of perspective to the society in which they lived. They were never afraid of over-educating.

So what is the challenge? What is it we should be most proud of? What is it that we should strive to achieve? I would say this: nothing should be more satisfying for us as educators than that we could say when someone asks us in this polarized world, in this specialized world, this tunnel-vision world in which we live, "Who speaks for the community?" that we could answer as an educational community, "Our students, and our graduates will be the ones to speak for the community." That has been our challenge, and it still is.

Community colleges usually claim to offer some programs of community based education including continuing education, community service, or lifelong learning opportunities for residents of the communities serviced by these schools. Because of the nature of these offerings, they are usually noncredit types of courses, they are seldom supported by the state since they do not fit into the FTE funding pattern envisioned by the legislature. Thus, these noncredit programs do not receive proper institutional support. Many high-level community college administrators decry this situation and tend to blame the lack of proper financial support on the legislative funding formulas. Rather than blame the state legislatures, I feel that the problem is more heavily campus based. If the high-level administrators showed more real commitment to lifelong learning in their institutions, the legislative view might well be different.

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